

The Mystery of the Summer House

A Fascinating Detective Story
By Horace Hutchinson



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"She lay there quite peacefully, almost as it might be one sleeping, on her back, with her deathly white face upward to the light. There was just one evidence, such terrible evidence, that she was not resting there quietly asleep—the stain of outrageous crimson which my startled eyes beheld against the bosom of her dress."

CHAPTER I. The Alarm

HOWEVER many years I may have to live, I am very certain that I can never efface from my mind any single detail of the one most terrible night that I ever spent in the whole course of my existence. I most devoutly wish I might. Even now I sometimes find myself, of a sudden, vividly awake at dead of night, starting out of a profound sleep and fancying I hear or have just heard a violent ringing at the door-bell.

That happens when I wake. When I am asleep it is a sound that haunts me in my dreams, and the series of dreadful things that followed are rehearsed in whole or in part, sometimes with quite impossible and fantastic exaggeration added to their already sufficient terror.

That first violent ringing of the front door-bell which was to serve, as it were, for the ringing up of the curtain upon all the tragic drama, must have happened as nearly as possible at midnight—no one seems to have noted the precise hour and minute, as, indeed, in the agitation of the moment I is not to be supposed that they would—of September 26th, 1913, the year before the outbreak of the great European war.

That awful war has made us familiar with horror to a degree

which would have seemed perfectly impossible before it. We could hardly have believed humanity capable of living through what it has endured since. And it may be that had all that horror been in our midst at that time the events of that September night might not have made quite such an impression on me. I do not know.

What I do know is that I awoke that night all of a sudden, as it seemed, out of a deep sleep to find myself listening to a violent continuous pealing of a bell. I knew its tone in a moment to be that of the front door-bell of the house—there was nothing unfamiliar or alarming in that. But what was most strange and terrifying was the hour for such a peal—since a few minutes make no matter, let us call it midnight—and its persistent energy. It was certain that the ringer must have very real reason for his energy—either that or it was a madman's hand that had the bell knob.

But my first thought was that which I suppose would come into the head of any one in the same circumstances—fire! So I switched on the light, dashed from my bed and began heaping on, in frantic haste, such articles of dress as came most handy; but almost before I had made so much as a beginning I heard the sound of a window close beside my own forcibly thrown open, and a voice calling out, "What is it? Who's there? What do you want?"

I knew the voice, it was my uncle Ralph's. My room was on the second floor, above his, but both looked out the same way toward the front of the house. I ran to my window, which was

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